

Number 7, October, 1999



# Project Newsletter

## SR 509/South Access Road

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### PROJECT UPDATE AND FUTURE ACTIVITIES

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#### EXECUTIVE COMMITTEE

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Dept. of Transportation  
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#### Project Background

Increased traffic congestion on Interstate 5 (I-5) and State Route 99, and southwest King County has lead to a search for a regional solution. The extension of State Route 509 (SR 509) would complement and balance travel on these routes. These key roads carry significant volumes of passengers, serve regional freight distribution areas, and provide access to the Seattle-Tacoma International Airport, Port of Seattle, and Port of Tacoma. The extension of SR 509 would:

- Improve freight mobility within the entire south King County area, the most heavily traveled freight corridor in the Pacific Northwest;
- Provide a direct south access link between I-5 and Sea-Tac Airport;
- Divert traffic from the heavily congested Southcenter Hill on I-5;
- Add auxiliary lanes on I-5 south to Federal Way;
- Provide for future high-occupancy-vehicle access between south Seattle and south King County;
- Allow convenient access to the southern terminus of the Sound Transit Light Rail and provide a direct link from I-5 to the airport for Sound Transit's Tacoma Region Express Bus; and
- Reduce congestion and air pollution on arterial streets in SeaTac, Burien, Des Moines, Federal Way, and Normandy Park.

#### Environmental Review Process

The development of an Environmental Impact Statement is a continuing discovery and disclosure process. In December 1995, a Corridor Level Draft Environmental Impact Statement (DEIS) that identified alternative solutions was released through the cooperative efforts of SeaTac, Des Moines, King County, Port of Seattle, Washington State Department of Transportation, and the Federal Highway Administration. It identified the extension of SR 509 from the

end of the existing freeway at South 188<sup>th</sup> Street/12<sup>th</sup> Place South, northwest of the Sea-Tac Airport, to I-5. A spur highway that would provide a southern connection to Sea-Tac Airport from the new SR 509 extension was also defined. The DEIS identified three corridors within which SR 509 and a South Access Road could be built and a hearing was held in 1996 for public comment.

In 1997 and 1998, based on public comments and coordination with federal, state and local city and county governments, it was determined that it would be cost effective and save time to further define specific road alignments and to prepare a Supplemental DEIS. With public input, more than 20 specific road alignments had been identified within these three corridors. The Executive and Steering Committees used environmental, economic, and feasibility criteria to screen out the least promising routes. The three best routes (Alternatives B, C, and D) that could accommodate the projected 35% growth in passenger vehicle and truck traffic by 2020 were presented to the public during an "open house" meeting in June 1998.

The feasibility, cost, environmental impacts, and degree of transportation improvement offered by these alternatives were studied in detail through February 1999. At that point, a "value analysis" was conducted to determine if the alternatives could be further improved.

#### Value Analysis

The value analysis team recommended that the cost and impacts of the alignments, such as residential displacements, could be reduced if the road did not have to avoid crossing a corner of Des Moines Creek Park. The park had been carefully avoided by designers because the use of park land for highway right-of-way is prohibited under Section 4(f) of the Department of Transportation Act, except in limited circumstances.

Based on the recommendation from the value analysis

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SR 509/SOUTH ACCESS ROAD  
Wednesday, October 27th

4:00 PM - 8:00 PM

Tyee High School Cafetorium  
4424 S. 188th Street, SeaTac

team, the Steering and Executive Committees decided to explore additional routes that might be permitted under the limited conditions of Section 4(f). Studies began this summer of the feasibility, impact, and cost of alignments that would cross a corner of Des Moines Creek Park, but would minimize residential displacements, use of developable lands, and conflicts with safety zones at the south end of Sea-Tac Airport runways.

Roadway designers conceived three alignments based on recommendations from the value analysis team. One involved minor adjustments to the preferred Alternative C (which they re-named Alternative C1). Two more were substantial variations of Alternative C. The new alternatives, C2 and C3, are described below and depicted in the figures that follow.

Alternatives in the other two corridors, B and D, have not changed and remain candidates.

## Summary of Alternatives

Since 1992, over 40 alternatives have been studied for the alignment of SR 509 and the South Access Road. Each was defined to minimize conflict with numerous natural and human constraints in the area. This included residences, businesses, wetlands, wildlife habitat, stormwater basins, airport safety zones, parklands, and other regional projects currently being developed. As alternatives were refined, or screened out in favor of better options, impacts to Des Moines Creek Park were a key factor. The outcome was alternative alignments B, C, and D (Alternative A represents no action). Alternatives C and D would take no land from the park. The SR 509 Executive Committee identified Alternative C as a preferred alternative.

Because Alternative C creates other impacts that could have high costs, safety and environmental impacts as well as a high number of residential displacements, the SR 509 Committee decided to examine other options. Consequently, Alternative C was redefined to include retaining walls which reduced the number of residences that it would displace, but raised its cost (this new configuration was named Alternative C1). Variants of Alternative C1, called Alternatives C2 and C3, were developed that impact the park, but are considered to be prudent options because they avoid or considerably reduce the adverse impacts of Alternative C1. It is anticipated that further study will show that Alternatives C2 and C3 represent a reasonable balance between the various environmental features affected, including residences, the park, and the runway protection zone.

The location of each alternative is described, below, and shown in the following illustrations.

## Previously Presented Alternatives

### Alternative A

Alternative A is the No-Action alternative.

### Alternative B

Alternative B would require the acquisition of park land by crossing the park at its narrowest point. It would displace 315 residential units, cost about \$447 million, and not require a tunnel to cross the runway protection zone.

### Alternative D

Alternative D avoids taking land from Des Moines Creek Park by staying in state-owned right-of-way. However, that right-of-way divides the park, creating indirect impacts to users of the trail in the park, similar to those of Alternative B. Public support for this alternative has been practically non-existent, and at \$490 million, it is the most expensive. It would require a tunnel where it crosses the Sea-Tac Airport runway protection zone, and would displace 500 residences.

## New Alternatives Under Consideration

### Alternative C1 (Modified Alternative C)

Alternative C1 was only slightly changed from Alternative C to add retaining walls at the south end and, thereby, narrow its right-of-way (see Figure).

While Alternative C1 avoids the park, it would run through the northern portion of the runway protection zone that is designated by the Federal Aviation Administration (FAA) to prohibit obstructions that would interfere with the safety of aircraft operations. FAA has indicated that the roadway would need a tunnel with sufficient structural strength to protect people on the ground from a crash landing. Unfortunately, tunnels pose their own risks. An airplane crash near the entrance could trap or burn motorists inside. A tunnel also raises the cost of the project by \$12 million, to about \$442 million. Up to 470 residential units would be displaced.

### Alternative C2 (New)

SR 509 would divert from the existing SR 509 alignment north of South 200<sup>th</sup> Street, cross through the northeast corner of the Des Moines Creek Park, and join with I-5 in roughly the same location as proposed under Alternatives B and C1 (see Figure). The South Access Road would have the same alignment as in Alternative C1.

While this alternative impacts the park, it is an improvement over C1 in that it would displace up to 465 residences, not require a tunnel in the runway protection zone, and consequently cost less (about \$411 million).

### Alternative C3 (New)

SR 509 would follow a similar alignment as Alternative C2, crossing the runway protection zone and the northwest corner of Des Moines Creek Park, then curving southeasterly toward an interchange with I-5 at roughly the same location as proposed under Alternatives B, C1, and C2 (see Figure). The South Access Road would also have the same alignment as Alternative C2.

While this alternative impacts the park, it has the fewest residential displacements (245) of any alternative, would not require a tunnel in the runway protection zone, and would cost about \$446 million.

## SR 509/South Access Road Funding

The 1999 State Legislature has approved \$148 million for the project based on revenues generated under Referendum 49 as passed by the public vote of November, 1998. This funding is expected to complete design engineering, right-of-way purchase, and the first construction phases of the project. Right-of-way acquisition is scheduled to begin in late 2001, with construction starting in 2003.

## Upcoming Project Milestones

Public Open House: October 27, 1999  
Draft EIS available for public review: Summer 2000  
Public Hearing: Fall 2000  
Final EIS available to the public: Winter 2000  
Selection of an alternative for implementation:  
Spring 2001  
Acquisition of right-of-way: Fall 2001  
Begin construction of first phase: To begin Fall 2003

## For Additional Information

If you want additional information or to comment on the alternatives, please come to the public Open House on October 27, 1999. Or contact:

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# ***You are invited ....***

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**SR 509/SOUTH ACCESS ROAD**  
**Wednesday, October 27th**  
**4:00 PM - 8:00 PM**  
**Tyee High School Cafetorium**  
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***The purpose of the Open House is to let you:***

- talk informally with the Steering Committee/study team;
- view maps of the refined project alternatives under study;
- identify issues and/or concerns about these alternatives; and
- give your comments on these alternatives.

*The open house site is accessible to persons with disabilities. Individuals requiring information prepared in alternative formats should call collect (360) 664-9009 or 1-800-486-8392 (TTY or relay service).*



**SR 509/South Access Road**  
**Steering Committee**  
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